

NEWS ARTICLE

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Holiday Strategies

The Holiday season brings with it lots of joy and excitement. It's time for turkeys and tinsel, menorahs and mangers, shopping, cooking and decorating. But it can also bring stress, headaches, and family tension. The pressure is on to bake the tastiest cookies, out-do your Mom's holiday dinner, buy the perfect gifts, decorate your home more festively than your neighbors, and throw the party of all parties. Plus, you want to find time to remember the spirit of the season. Following are some tips to help you manage...

TIME MANAGEMENT:

Planning is crucial!! Not only at holiday times, but throughout the year, having a plan and being organized makes things easier. Start early. Don't wait till December.

Draft a schedule that includes all the tasks you have to complete, how long you think each will take and when each needs to be done. Write everything on a calendar and hang it on the refrigerator door.

Don't overload weekends. Spread things out over the weeks preceding the holidays and spend half an hour or so each evening cleaning, wrapping, cooking, etc.

Do two things at once. If you're baking, start cleaning the kitchen while the dough is rising. Write cards while you're talking on the phone or waiting to pick up the kids.

If possible, schedule activities you dread for times of day when you have the most energy.

Use a spiral notebook to keep track of purchases, listing everyone to shop for, and writing down the items beside each name. Use the same notebook for several years. Looking back helps you vary selections. Go over your list and plan your shopping. Or if planning on ordering, do it early. You can also write your Christmas card list in the back of the book.

Use your computer for your Christmas mailing list. It's easy to update and print your labels (to and from). Divide the number of cards you will be sending by 14, then do that many each day for two weeks.

Prioritize your cleaning. Clean and shine everything that's visible, but leave deep cleaning for a cold day in January.

Be realistic about how much you can do. Don't be afraid to say no if you can't do something. Or come up with something easier.

Shop early—Not only for gifts! Buy plenty of film, batteries and candles. Stock the pantry. If possible, have a few extra gifts for unexpected guests (or those you forgot!).

Plan ahead and get as much done ahead of time as possible—such as baking and freezing, double batching, mailing early.

Create a storage area for holiday items—decorations, gifts, etc. Make a list at the end of the season of things you can reuse next year—cards, napkins, gift wrap.

MONEY MANAGEMENT:

Plan on spending and budget your money as a family. Shopping early allows you to spread expenditures over more than one pay period. Keep a list of purchases and money spent.

Save receipts and keep records in case something needs to be returned.

Read labels, signs, hangtags, guarantees.

Celebrate Holidays without going broke

1. How much did you spend last year on the Holidays? This will be a good guide to use. Can you spend more? Less?

2. Determine how you will pay for extras.

Assets: Christmas Club Account

Savings Bonus

Cash on hand Checking balance

Liabilities: Debts Credit card balances due

Monthly bills Holiday expenses

3. What will you spend money on during the holidays?

Special Activities Entertaining

Increased food bill Gifts

Trips Postage

Extra phone bills Tipping

Other

4. Determine how much you can spend. Estimate how much you have available to spend. Some people find a special savings account helpful.

Will you charge your purchases or pay cash? If you charge, how much can you pay a month? How long will it take to pay off your debt? Remember the

interest is a holiday expense too!

5. Stick to your plan!!

* Are you giving gifts because you want to or because you feel you must?

* Are you trying to outdo the other person?

* Set a price limit and stick to it.

6. How did you do?

Total up expenses for the Holiday season. If you went over budget, you may want to set up a special savings plan to take care of this next year. Or utilize better shopping/planning skills to avoid the same mistakes in the future.

STRESS MANAGEMENT:

From Thanksgiving to New Year, there is a greater incidence of tension-type headaches and migraines. Family stresses and long lines are enough to trigger tension headaches even in people who aren't headache prone. To help avoid or deal with this stress:

Shop early!

Plan ahead!

Delegate!

Practice relaxation and stretching techniques—neck rolls, slow deep breaths. Listen to quiet, soothing music in a darkened room.

Find some time to be alone.

Try to go to sleep and wake up the same time every day. Altered sleep patterns can also cause headaches (too much and too little!).

Be aware of any foods or environmental factors that may cause headaches.

Alcohol should be drunk in moderation.

Above all, enjoy!

If you have a question, call Linda Bowman, Family and Consumer Sciences Extension Agent, The University of Florida--Santa Rosa County Cooperative Extension Service--IFAS, at (850)623-3868 or (850)939-1259, Ext. 1360 for south county residents, between the hours of 8:00 a.m. and 4:30 p.m. weekdays. Hearing impaired individuals may call Santa Rosa County Emergency Management Service at 983-5373 (TDD).

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